

**Prepared Remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft
Plea Agreement Announcement
June 19, 2003**

(Note: The Attorney General often deviates from prepared remarks.)

Good afternoon.

On any given day, Iyman Faris appeared to be a hard working independent truck driver. Working out of Columbus, Ohio, he freely crisscrossed the country, making deliveries to airports and businesses without raising a suspicion.

But Faris led a secret, double life. He traveled to Pakistan and Afghanistan, covertly met with Osama Bin Laden, and joined Al Qaeda's jihad against America.

From late 2000 to March of this year, Faris worked in concert with our Al Qaeda enemies to plot potential attacks against America and its citizens here in his adopted homeland.

This afternoon, I am announcing that Judge Leonie Brinkema, of the United States District Court in the Eastern District of Virginia, has unsealed the guilty plea of Iyman Faris, a/k/a Mohammed Rauf.

On May 1st, Faris pled guilty to two charges: conspiracy to provide material support to the Al Qaeda organization, as well as providing material support to that terrorist group.

With this two-count plea, the Department of Justice continues to root out terrorists and those who support terrorists and continue to operate here in the United States.

Faris has admitted to:

- In late 2000, meeting with Osama Bin Laden and other senior Al Qaeda operatives;
- In late 2000 or early 2001, providing Al Qaeda with research on ultralight planes, which Al Qaeda intended to use in its terrorism;
- In early 2001, providing Al Qaeda with material support, including dealings involving cash, thousands of sleeping bags, plane tickets, and cell phones; and
- Between April 2002 and March 2003, scouting sites for acts of terrorism in the United States, including a bridge in New York and train tracks.

Shortly after the horrific assault of September 11th, we learned of and began to anticipate and plan for a potential second wave of terrorist attacks. We knew that Al Qaeda and its network of

terrorist operatives remained in the United States, planning and pursuing potential attacks against America and its citizens.

Since September 11th, we worked diligently to uncover supporters of terrorism:

- In Buffalo, New York, where we obtained guilty pleas from six men for providing material support to Al Qaeda;
- In Detroit, where two men were recently convicted of providing material support to terrorists;
- In Seattle, where Earnest James Ujaama pleaded guilty to providing support to the Taliban.

The Justice Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and state and local law enforcement agencies have been using all available legal tools to detect, to disrupt and to dismantle terrorist threats here at home.

This investigation highlights the importance of the law enforcement tools, such as the USA PATRIOT Act, that the Justice Department, law enforcement agencies and intelligence agencies have been able to use to better communicate and coordinate complex, international anti-terrorism operations. Because of this close cooperation, we are thwarting terrorist operatives from further activities.

The case of Iyman Faris is but the latest.

Faris was born in Kashmir on June 4, 1969. He entered the United States in May 1994 and became a United States citizen in December 1999. For several years he has worked as an independent truck driver from his home base of Columbus, Ohio.

According to the plea documents, in late 2000, Faris traveled to Pakistan and joined with a long-time friend and supporter of Al Qaeda to travel to Afghanistan. There, at an Al Qaeda training camp, Faris met with Osama Bin Laden.

During his stay in the camp, Faris was asked by one of Bin Laden's lieutenants about obtaining information about "ultralight" airplanes. Faris agreed to do so.

Approximately two months later, back in Pakistan, Faris admits that he went to a Karachi Internet café and performed an online search. He downloaded information about ultralight aircraft and provided it to an Al Qaeda representative.

In late 2000 or early 2001 in Pakistan, Faris helped procure 2,000 sleeping bags that were shipped to Afghanistan for use by Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

Faris also admits to visiting a Karachi travel agency, where, wearing a disguise, he obtained extensions on five or six airline tickets so that Al Qaeda operatives could travel to Yemen.

In early 2002, Faris performed another service to Al Qaeda, delivering cash and cell phones to a senior Al Qaeda operative. In this meeting with a terrorist leader, Faris outlined his job as a truck driver, detailing his routes and deliveries for airport cargo planes. The senior Al Qaeda operative was interested in the cargo planes, according to Faris, because they would hold "more weight and more fuel."

During this meeting, in early 2002, Faris says he was told of Al Qaeda plans for yet another simultaneous operation in New York City and Washington, D.C. The plans included destroying a bridge in New York City by severing its suspension cables.

Faris was asked to assist in providing the equipment for the operation. His main task was procuring what the Al Qaeda leaders called "gas cutters" that could burn through the bridge cables. Faris was instructed to refer to them in code as "gas stations" in any subsequent communications with Al Qaeda.

Faris also was instructed to purchase the necessary equipment that would allow Al Qaeda operatives to derail trains. Communications were to be made through the Internet. In messages to the Al Qaeda leader, these derailment tools were to be referred to as "mechanics shops."

Upon returning to the United States from Pakistan in April 2002, Faris admits to performing Internet research on "gas cutters" and a bridge in New York City. Faris also approached an acquaintance with technical knowledge and asked about obtaining "gas cutters."

Between April 2002 and March 2003, Faris confirms he sent several coded e-mail messages indicating that he was still trying to obtain "gas stations" and "mechanics shops."

In late 2002, Faris admits to traveling to New York. After casing the particular bridge, he concluded that the plot to destroy the bridge was unlikely to succeed because of the bridge's security and structure. He sent a coded message to his Al Qaeda contact, which stated, "The weather is too hot." This message conveyed the defendant's assessment that the bridge plot was unlikely to succeed.

It is clear from this plea agreement that Al Qaeda knew that Faris, wrapped in the cloak of American citizenship, and protected by the liberties of our Republic, could travel unfettered and undetected from country to country, state to state, city to city.

This case has many of the hallmarks we have come to recognize in Al Qaeda operations: recruitment of sympathetic operatives, extensive planning and travel inside several countries, and extensive use of hard-to-track communications such cell phones and the Internet cafes.

In apprehending Faris and reaching this plea agreement, we have taken another American-based Al Qaeda operative off the streets, who appeared to be a hard-working American trucker, but secretly scouted terrorist strikes that could have killed many of his fellow citizens.

Using the new information-sharing system implemented since the 9/11 attacks, the threat information that Faris provided was promptly disseminated through the intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security communities, to make them aware of the threats and allow them to properly and promptly respond.

This case highlights the very real threats that still exist here at home in this war against terrorism.

To our enemies, this case sends a clear message that the United States will continue to be vigilant against all threats, whether they come from overseas or here at home.

To our citizens, this case sends a clear message that your government will continue to respect the rule of law, while doing everything in its power to prevent terrorist attacks.

I thank Criminal Section Acting Assistant Attorney General Chris Wray, who has joined me here today; and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the leadership of Director Robert Mueller; Pat D'Amuro, the FBI's executive assistant director for counterterrorism and counterintelligence is here, and I thank him for his hard work and service.

I also thank U.S. Attorney Greg Lockhart of the Southern District of Ohio and U.S. Attorney Paul McNulty of the Eastern District of Virginia; these offices worked together on this investigation.

Thanks also to the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, headed by Barry Sabin, and prosecutors Joe Kaster from the Counterterrorism Section and Neil Hammerstrom of the Eastern District of Virginia, and Dana Peters of the Southern District of Ohio.

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